SPIRITUALITY-THE MISSING DIMENSION IN TODAY’S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Aditi Khanna
Student, Department of Civil Engineering,
Chandigarh University, Gharuan - 140413, Punjab, India

Jagdish Kamboj
Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering,
Chandigarh University, Gharuan - 140413, Punjab, India

ABSTRACT

The construction industry being challenging and stimulating, provides vast career and achievement scope but also vast pressure levels, which if not dealt well leads to anxiety, stress, depression, etc. In the recent times, cases of suicides, stress, and depression are on an increase. Also, present day economic systems of the industry are divorced from ethics. Workers have generated unethical trends making bribery and corruption too common in the industry. Current world’s fiscal scene clearly shows that our economic thinking, models of planning and development are out of touch with reality and are estranged from ethics.

Although developments in the field of civil engineering have enabled man to have a huge material progress and live a comfortable life, people are far from experiencing true peace and satisfaction of mind. This indicates that our efforts are totally inclined towards the provision of relaxation or comfort to the body (physical conform), neglecting the inner needs or the spiritual needs of our mind and intellect. Of all our present time problems, this is the main cause. There is an urge to raise the employees by their spiritual empowerment. A number of multinational companies all around the world are now paying attention towards this science of meditation, spirituality and ethics for helping their employees, to save them from burnout and to for improving their efficiency and character. Hence, the paper touches the note that while ensuring steady material progress, it is equally essential to maintain spiritual progress. It frees the individual from sorrow, suffering, misery, pain, depression, fear, anxiety, illness, disease, insecurity and phobias and enables to experience constant true peace, true happiness, true love and lasting health, wealth and prosperity. It increases the potential of human mind to perform better in all respects. This paper depicts a review of previous research work done on similar titles and provides a common conclusion for all of them.
1. INTRODUCTION

It is now being increasingly realized that the society, the construction industry and the world needs coordination between both science and spirituality. There was a time when there was antagonism between Science, religion and environment. Now, apart from science and technology, we need ethical and spiritual values for promoting inner (spiritual and humane) aspects of our nature and that blind faith and irrational/rigid dogmas that cause violent conflict in the society and environment need to be discarded.

During the past century, particularly during the last four or five decades, there have been numerous attempts for scientific orientation of spirituality and spiritual orientation of engineering science. There has been a high spurt in the efforts to find parallels between both disciplines and some scientists and spiritualists have shown how both can play complementary roles in knowing both the cosmos and the consciousness.

Also people are now stressing upon the importance of observation of some ethical principles in regard to development and environment

1.1. Hike in stress and suicide rate in the industry

Occupations of the construction industry, both management and professional are demanding in nature. There is a need to manage the deadlines and tight margins. To execute a complex construction project successfully, multi skills are required. All this makes our construction industry a very challenging and a very stimulating profession. Though in this profession there is vast scope of career and achievements but also a vast level of pressure. If this pressure is not countered well, it will cause anxiety, frustration, stress, depression, suicides, etc. The level of stress among the professionals of our construction industry are increasing day by day.[1]

CIPD’s (CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL AND DEVELOPMENT) Annual report, out in 2005, mentioned that the main reason of illness is stress, among all employees of construction industry [2]. Another recent research by HSE commission, UK indicated stress felt at workplace is making around half million people of UK, ill and weak. Also this survey added, 12.8 million working days were lost due to stress, depression and anxiety. This was for the year 2004-2005. It countered a minimum loss of 4 billion Euros [3]. A recent survey by Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) concluded that 84% of professionals of our industry said that stress is the cause for poor output and retention levels. 578 out of 847 professionals’ surveyed, claimed to suffer from depression, stress, anxiety [4].

Such responses as per these reports and surveys clearly point out that we are suffering from a serious problem in our industry. Out of all the factors affecting workplace stress in our industry was recorded - “immense work load”, “Pressure”, “ambitious targets deadlines”, “un resolute inter personal conflicts”, “poor effective communication”, “lack of feedback” and “lack of privacy”. 

Key words: Meditation, Mindfulness, Corruption, Stress, Stress Management, Spirituality, Construction Industry.

This clearly bulges out weakness of managing staff and individual’s inner/mental strength. Stress, the major issue of concern for the construction industry is proving to worsen the pre existing bad image that our industry has.

Poor psychosocial conditions of working, job insecurity and poor workplace support imparts a significant impact on the health of workers in construction industry. [5]. These factors related to industry and workplace influence suicide rate within the industry, especially in the industries who call themselves blue collared. The workers working in them face very poor psychological conditions.[6]. Such extreme psychosocial conditions of working have adverse and ill effects on mental health [7]. There is preliminary proof from countries like Germany and Japan, extremely poor psychological and social working conditions lead to suicides [8]. In different parts of the world, an increased rate of suicide by construction workers has been noted, comprising Denmark [9], Canada[10], the USA[11], the UK[12], Australia[13], etc. Excessive consumption of alcohol, inadequacy of seeking help, problems in relationships is also connected to suicides among the workers of construction industry. [14].

1.2. Money games in the Industry

Another huge problem the construction industry is facing today is corruption and bribery. The World Bank had imaged corruption as one of the biggest barriers to economic and social development, adding that it has a particular huge negative impact on the lower and poorest sections of the society [15]. Construction industry has an global reputation in field of corruption., bribery and misappropriation. American Society of Civil Engineers, claim that approximately $340,000,000,000 each year, of construction costs, accounts for corruption worldwide. [16]

The Society of Civil Engineers, in a survey estimated that 10 %[$400bn], spent on construction worldwide is lost to corruption.[17]. In the year 2011, the placement of construction industry sector was at number 1 position with maximum propensity, out of 19 sectors of the industries in paying bribes as per Bribe Payer Index [18].

The figures of loss mentioned above are huge. Corruption besides this loss also brings further consequences with it -

- Inferior quality of public infrastructure which further adds to reduce productivity [19].
- Decreased efficiency to provide public goods for all [mainly in developing countries][20].

Though the rules by the government in this area are strict, criminal prosecution may include unlimited fines, imprisonment, disqualification, restriction for taking part in governmental contracts, etc. These risks are very real and so is the driving force to have more and more money. The consequence of both of these is debilitating. It is to be understood that bribery and corruption may grant gains in the short term, but ultimately, they are bad both for the individuals and for the business.

Spirituality gives us the proper, right philosophy of life would, therefore, be to use things so as to fulfill one’s need but not get mad after them, for the desires will multiply. If we fulfill our daily need and do not have greed, we will certainly have neither to suppress our desires nor give them a lose rope.

We should understand that all rewards and punishments or pleasures and pains that come to us are a result of our own actions. So, we should neither be angry nor
have any fear. The only focus should be in improving the quality of our actions. Doing this is the real path to happiness and health.

1.3. Spirituality- a better tool to enhance output/performance

Spiritual education and technical engineering education are generally kept in different facets of our lives. These two facets might come out at times in conversations during ethics sessions, but, in reality, in our lives, the co ordination and combination of the two is not an easy achievement [21].

Many industries, business minds and researchers have shown an increase in rate of researches done in this field of spirituality. This rise in bending towards this direction is seen to be worldwide. Many sectors like Social Work, Health, Business, Management, Psychology, and Adult Learning have evolved in it.[22,23,24,25,26]

Spirituality is the means to counter the negative facets of life like: death, stress, illness etc. Spirituality and stress are inversely proportional. More the spirituality, lower the stress and vice versa. [27]

Today’s construction activities are large scale and complex, so are the problems/difficulties faced by the entire construction team. In such critical situations and work pressure employees tend to be weak and negative, a wave of peacelessness and anguish is generated. All are dissatisfied, overpowered by innumerable desires. Workplace stress had emerged as a major issue for businesses, reaching an alarming proportion. Stress reduction and prevention techniques must be developed by the organizations. Not, it’s high time that all organizations should pass a new legislation regarding introduction of meditation practices to cope with this problem. This will make employees stress free, more productive, hard working [28].

Today, there is a need to empower the employees by spiritual empowerment. Internal/ self empowerment is the only basis of external/organization’s empowerment. How this mechanism works of attaining celestial degrees by divine virtues and spiritual service will be studies and recommendations will be concluded on the basis of the study to empower all employees for efficient performance and management in the construction projects. Also, latest researches[both India and Abroad [29, 30, 31 ,32] have proved that people with higher SQ[Spirituality Quotient] gave better performance output that those have higher IQ[Intelligence Quotient] and EQ[Emotional Quotient]. SQ is being given higher preference because managers want to be certain that they are buying useful training. People with higher SQ were proven to be more evaluative, insightful, creative, problem solving, visionary, breakthrough thinkers, resilient, etc.

Recent research and studies on mindfulness prove that meditation is very significant for mental and physical benefits. Many big companies of the world are turning towards this science of meditation to help their employees, to avoid burnout and to improve efficiency. This anti stress strategy is being adopted all over in all industries. Some of the world reputed firms adopting this are [33]

1. Google [Search inside yourself program for all employees]
2. Green Mountain Coffee Roasters [Company’s daily schedule begins with deep breathing and meditation exercise]
3. Apple [Special meditation rooms and 30 minutes compulsory meditation for all employees]
4. Nike International [Special quiet meditation rooms to offer relaxation to employees as per requirement]
5. Yahoo [On site meditation rooms for the employees]
6. Deutsche Bank [Regular meditation classes and practices for years for the employees]
7. HBO [Gym, yoga and meditation classes for both physical and mental health of the employees]

Google, Aetna, General Mills, and Target confirm, inculcation of mindfulness in their workplaces has bought a decline in employees’ level of stress, increased concentration power and clarity, improved their listening and decision-making skills, and made their overall happiness and well-being better. Also, from the view point of an HR and talent management professionals, mindfulness can deduct employee absenteeism and turnover, empower employee and client relationships, and increase the level of job satisfaction. [34,35,36]

1.4. Spirituality for ethical empowerment in the industry

The root cause of corruption and bribery is that today’s professionals are running after money because of unmanageable desires. In the present day world, money is the main consideration of people. Man’s status is measured by in terms of money. A man is considered a great man if he has amassed great wealth.

One’s standard of living is determined in terms of one’s show off of wealth rather than his moral greatness. People, who possess to be engaged in social service or those who are asked to help in public welfare work, generally do so for considerations of some monetary gains only. Almost everyone has become so money minded that people have started saying it openly that God cannot be worshipped if one has an empty stomach and that in order to acquire something for one’s livelihood one need not bother about the question whether one is doing it by fair or unfair means. Money has become everything and everything is valued in terms of money. Even moral values have lost their importance and we commonly hear, “Everybody is dishonest”, “making little money out of the way won’t make things worse”.

The entire construction industry today, in fact, the entire corporate society lays more emphasis on materialistic progress. It has neglected the spiritual health of human personality, which forms the very basis of human existence and everything linked to it. Although developments of civil engineering have enabled mankind to have an extensive material progress and a comfortable life, people are far from experience of true mental peace and contentment. This demonstrates that while we have become totally preoccupied with the provision of comfort to the physical body we have neglected the inner needs and mind’s spiritual needs. Therefore, maintaining static material progress and maintaining inner/spiritual progress are equally important. If both civil engineering and spirituality can play a complementary role, without any way negating the other’s role, this imperfect world can be definitely transformed into a paradise on earth.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At present, our construction industry, both in India and abroad is being unable to deal with serious issues like stress management, increasing suicide rate of construction workers, corruption, bribery, conflicts, etc. The main root of all these problems is pollution of thoughts and mind, referred as mental pollution. It can be removed by spiritual awakening. By inculcating the divine virtues like purity, peace, contentment, equality and a constructive attitude, major problems in the world today can be resolved like all kinds of pollution.
A mind filled with divine virtues of peace, happiness, and love can be referred to a tree, a tree that is abounded with leaves, blossoming with beautiful flowers and fruits, providing unselfish shade, solace and sustenance to everything and everyone linked with it.[37]

For re cultivation of this mental state, we need the power of self awareness. Knowledge of the self, our true identity of being a soul, filled with light and might.[37]. Rajyoga meditation is the way by which we can achieve this. Presently, what we observe is that people’s mind is agitated and is unstable, the intellect is dull and contracted, and the traits are constantly impure. Only by gradually purifying the sanskars/traits/resolves, divinizing the intellect and controlling the mind, establishment of a clear link/connection with the supreme soul is made possible. It is a direct process utilizing thought energy. This linking or union is called rajyoga mediation. Through this spiritual communion, each soul is once again able to experience it’s true identity, and regain it’s true original potential and power. The purpose of this is freeing the individual soul from the grievous bondages of sorrow, suffering, misery, pain, depression, fear, anxiety, illness, disease, insecurity and phobias and enabling the soul to experience constant, un interrupted and continuous true peace, true happiness, true love and lasting health, wealth and prosperity. It increases the potential of human mind to perform better in all respects and progress towards a perfect condition. Spirituality enables us to[38]-

1. To learn how to have more control of your own thoughts, feelings and behavior
2. To become a better leader through self understanding. The knowledge/principles of spirituality are applied practically.
3. To take more responsibility for own life and stop blaming others or circumstances.
4. To take more personal responsibility for your mind’s state and emotions.
5. To develop the art to communicate well with people
6. To help manage major life changes.
7. Increase productivity and efficiency is by getting the body and the mind in perfect coordination.

Deep understanding of how it happens, by medical sciences, is due to increased activation in a region of the brain correlated with positive effect, as well as evidence that the immune system works even more efficiently in producing antibodies as post a post meditation effect [39]. The more advanced meditators showed more activation in those areas of the brain that detects emotional cues, demonstrating a heightened empathic awareness [40]. The idea behind meditation is to consciously relax/lose your physical body and concentrate on your thoughts on the same thing for a continuous period. This occupies your mind, diverting it from the problems that are causing you stress also relaxes and recuperates your body, and to clear away stress hormones. Meditation is an essential, useful and a practical technique for relaxation. [41]

We should have that education, training and practice which can enable us to change our old habits, tendencies and hardened traits. This kind of education is spiritual education. It is the real cure for all our mental and physical ailments for a lasting period. Besides this we need to understand that thoughts, emotions, desires, etc are not physical entities. They are metaphysical entities. They emanate from the soul. If we culture our soul to be positive always, free from impurities and desires, full of divinity, we will be happy and healthy
3. CONCLUSION
The research has found that polluted mind is the root cause of major problems that the construction industry faces today. Though being the root cause of all these problems, no significant efforts are yet being made to win over it. Today’s professionals are running after money because of unmanageable desires. Also, the tight schedule and deadlines impairs serious ailments to the employees. Spirituality gives us the proper, right philosophy of life would, therefore, be to use things so as to fulfill one’s need but not get mad after them, for the desires will multiply. If we fulfill our daily need and do not have greed, we will certainly have neither to suppress our desires nor give them a lose rope. We should understand that all rewards and punishments or pleasures and pains that come to us are a result of our own actions. So, we should neither be angry nor have any fear. The only focus should be in improving the quality of our actions. Doing this is the real path to happiness and health.

Spirituality comes out as a solution for the problem. Spirituality is the key to resolve the serious problems our construction industry in facing today like corruption, stressful environment, increasing suicide rate, safety, etc. Changing mindset is the root to all further changes. Spirituality enables us to-

1. To be able to control, monitor and regulate own thoughts, emotions/feelings and traits/behavior (approved medically).
2. To be able to be a leader by understanding the self and by applying principles and applications of spirituality.
3. To be strong enough to hold responsibility for own life, without blaming other people or circumstances.
4. To be able to take complete responsibility for own mind’s state and emotions.
5. To be able to effective communicate with others, being impartial, love and light.
6. To be able to cope up with dynamicity and major changes in life.
7. Overall, spiritual and value based increases productivity and efficiency, as the body and the mind get in perfect coordination.

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